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Does the multi-informant Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) predict adolescent psychiatric diagnoses?

Jorien Vugteveen¹, Annelies de Bildt²,³, Catharina Hartman⁴ & Marieke Timmerman⁵

¹ Heymans Institute for Psychological Research, University of Groningen, The Netherlands. ² Department of Psychiatry, University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG), The Netherlands. ³ Accare Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Groningen, The Netherlands. ⁴ Department of Psychiatry, University of Groningen, University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG), The Netherlands.

What & Why

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is internationally widely used to screen for psychosocial problems among adolescents. In clinical settings, the SDQ is used to provide clinicians with a preliminary impression of the type of problems at hand. Currently, knowledge on how useful the SDQ is for predicting adolescent psychiatric diagnoses is limited. We assessed the predictive and discriminative value of adolescent- and parent-rated SDQ scores for psychiatric disorders, diagnosed by professionals in outpatient community clinics, in a sample of 2753 Dutch adolescents aged 12–17.

How

Per SDQ scale, its predictive strength for the disorder it is content-wise related to (hyperactivity/inattention scale for ADHD, conduct scale for CD/ODD, emotional scale for Anxiety/Mood disorder, social and prosocial scales for ASD), was assessed through a logistic regression analysis.

The discriminative strength of the SDQ scales was assessed through additional logistic regression analyses by using the SDQ scales to predict the disorders they are content-wise unrelated to.

Results

Predictive strength

Assess how well each SDQ scale predicts the disorder it is content-wise related to:

AUC values indicating predictive strength per disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>SDQ scale(s)</th>
<th>Informant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADHD²⁴</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Adolescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety/Mood disorder</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Social + Prosocial</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD/ODD</td>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AUC = Area under the (receiver operating) curve

² ADHD = Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (n = 872), Anxiety/Mood disorder (n = 1,179), ASD = Autism Spectrum Disorder (n = 620), CD/ODD = Conduct/ Oppositional Disorder (n = 323)

Discriminative strength

Assess how well each SDQ scale unintendedly predicts the disorders it is content-wise unrelated to:

AUC values indicating discriminative strength per disorder

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Emotional</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD/ODD</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion & Implication

Adolescent as informant
- The hyperactivity scale is predictive for ADHD

Parent as informant
- The hyperactivity scale is predictive for ADHD
- The conduct scale is predictive for CD/ODD
- The social & prosocial scales are predictive for ASD

Besides being sufficiently predictive, each above mentioned scale sufficiently discriminates between the disorder it is content-wise related to and other disorders.

The SDQ emotional scale is insufficiently indicative of the presence of Anxiety/Mood disorders, regardless of the informant that was used.

The findings suggest that parent-rated SDQ scores can be used to provide clinicians with a preliminary impression of the type of problems for ADHD, CD/ODD, and ASD, and adolescent-rated scores for ADHD.

Want to read more?


Contact: j.vugteveen@rug.nl